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Audience with members of the Italian Association against Leukaemia, Lymphoma and Myeloma (AIL)

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Italian Association against Leukaemia, Lymphoma and Myeloma (AIL), to whom he delivered the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I am happy to meet so many of you on the occasion of the fifty-fifth anniversary of your Association. Thank you for your visit and, above all, thank you for what you do. In addition to funding research for the treatment of leukaemia, lymphoma and myeloma, and the development of specialized centres in the area, you offer hospitality to patients and their families, home care and closeness to so many people with thousands of volunteers. Closeness is one of God's qualities: close, compassionate and tender. And you do likewise: being close with so much compassion and so much tenderness. Closeness, do not forget that. Yours is a testimony of solidarity and proximity, even more important in this world marked by individualism. Once I was asked what was the feature of a certain association, too individualistic, and I said: "No, I don't know what the feature is, but I know its motto: 'I, me, with me and for me'. At the centre, I, me, with me and for me. It is pure egotism.

I would like to give you three words to support your journey and your work.

I take the first from the motto you have chosen for this meeting: "Together we illuminate the future". It is the word "*illuminate*". Indeed, illness often plunges the person and their family into the darkness of pain and anguish, giving rise to solitude and closure. At the social level, it is often perceived as a defeat, something to conceal, eliminate; the sick are rejected in the name of efficiency and strength, suffering is marginalized because it causes fear and hinders plans. Instead, it is urgent to place the sick person, with his or her history and relationships – family, friendship, and therapeutic ones – in order to find meaning in pain and give answers to the

many “whys”. Even when all seems lost, it is possible to hope. But it takes someone to bring a little light, a flame of hope, with friendship, closeness and listening.

The second word is *giving*. These people who bring a little light are the “givers”. The logic of giving is the main antidote to the throwaway culture. Every time we give, the throwaway culture is weakened, indeed annulled; it is consumerism, which apparently would even like to take possession of our lives, that is defeated by this virtuous logic. The first to give himself is God Himself, in His creative love; it is Jesus, in His Incarnation.

In a few days’ time it will be Christmas: we will look at that Infant given to the world so that we can all be saved. Let us draw strength from His fragility, comfort from His cry, courage from His tenderness. Once again, the word “tenderness”. Do not forget this.

The third word is the *town square*. Your Association is present on the streets, and works from the grass roots. It is the commitment not to stay closed up in one’s own orchard to cultivate one’s own interests, but to inspire the territory, to be a tangible sign and a visible but never intrusive presence: presence, but not intrusive. In the town square you demonstrate the desire to be with the people, to share their pain, to be good Samaritans. This is a gift you give to the whole of society. You are visible but not for yourselves, for the people who are in need. And in this way, you contribute to supporting scientific research, to increasing the knowledge that is part of the best Italian healthcare tradition, and to ensuring attention to people who need to feel accompanied in therapy. You are a building block in the construction of two hopes: the hope for a cure, always, and the hope of therapy, in its most up-to-date methods.

Dear friends, today we celebrate Saint John of the Cross, a great mystic, who recalled that: “In the twilight of life, we will be judged on how well we loved”. Thank you for the love and the hope you give! Keep going, with dedication and skill. I heartily bless you, all of you, and all those who form the network of your Association. And please, do not forget to pray for me! Thank you.
